



The Frontline Supervisor

*Helping You Manage Your Company's
Most Valuable Resource - Employees*

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◆ I am an accomplished leader, but peers think that I am too controlling. I want to model good team skills for my employees. Which skills would be helpful for my own growth and good for my employees to see?

◆ My employee injured her back at work and is out for the next several weeks. She is a good performer with an excellent work record. Should I recommend she contact the EAP?

◆ I am the new supervisor of an employee who was recently referred to the EAP by the previous supervisor. No release exists for me to speak with the EAP. How do I get one signed? Why doesn't the EAP use a "blanket" release?

Some of the most valuable team skills can be tough to practice, even for a strong leader with vision, passion, and a record of accomplishments. Your success demonstrates an ability to focus on an outcome and work with others to achieve it. Still, there's always room for growth. Challenge yourself and grow by practicing these skills: 1) Demonstrate being open to feedback and constructive criticism; 2) Share control by letting others be in charge, even when you must be responsible for the outcome; 3) Let others discover their own way of accomplishing a task, even if you know a better way; 4) Share information and seek continually to improve methods of sharing it; and 5) Share success with team members by recognizing that you are not the most important person on the team, but a member of a team with an important purpose.

Suggesting the EAP is a good idea. The EAP can offer support or locate services that your injured employee may find valuable. Injured employees out of work may experience unexpected stresses and personal problems that can delay their recovery. These setbacks can include depression from chronic pain, loss of mobility, and loss of work identity; anger at coworkers who don't call to inquire as to their condition; and conflict in relationships from sudden changes in roles, sharing of chores, and other responsibilities at home. Frustration and guilt over the inability to return to work or to function at pre-injury levels can also interfere with recovery. Men and women may react differently to these stresses. EAP help for an injured employee can mean the difference between a short time off work and an injury that becomes a chronic problem.

You should review with your employee the reasons for the supervisor referral and request that he or she sign a release so you can confirm attendance at the EAP and adoption of the EA professional's recommendations. Typically, EAPs use a separate release form for each person for whom an employee has requested communication. A blanket release is not used in EAP practice because confidentiality laws and their provisions require separate releases. Such strict confidentiality safeguards protect employees and contribute to greater usage. If your employee refuses to sign a release permitting the EA professional to speak with you, continue to monitor performance. Check to ensure no agreement was made with your employee to hold an adverse action in abeyance in exchange for attendance at the EAP and adoption of its recommendations.

◆ Only at my third confrontation of my employee about performance problems did he say marital problems were to blame. We agreed he would visit the EAP. I wish I could have learned about these problems earlier. What could I have done?

◆ I planned to make a formal supervisor referral of my employee to the EAP, but at the last minute I only suggested it. My employee agreed to go, so I was satisfied. Can you comment on this approach? Does it equate to a supervisor referral in effectiveness?

Notes:

As you discovered, employees are not inclined to share information about their personal problems with employers. Some employees will not share such information even when termination looms. But, they may be very willing to accept a supervisor referral to the EAP. This objective, rather than discovery of personal problems, is your goal. So, there is nothing you should have done to learn of the personal problem sooner. Admittedly, a referral is more likely when personal problems are self-disclosed. Therefore, you could ask your employee if he or she believes something personal is interfering with performance. If the answer is yes, encourage use of the EAP. Do not probe further or counsel your employee. Another approach to facilitate an earlier referral is to say that you are making a supervisor referral in the event a personal problem is interfering with performance.

Employees with performance problems who are referred to the EAP using your approach frequently go because they feel a sense of urgency associated with the supervisor's concerns about their performance. Their motivation to adopt EAP recommendations may be less, however, increasing the likelihood that performance problems will remain. Motivation is often diminished when communication between the supervisor and the EAP does not exist. You may see a short period of improvement as a natural result of the corrective interview and it could last. If you do not see the performance changes you want, however, you should consider a formal supervisor referral. Do not allow yourself to become frustrated with the EAP, believing that the program was not effective. An employee who gives the EA professional consent to communicate with his or her supervisor usually has much more motivation to adopt EAP recommendations.

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